

I. Amendments to the Specification

Kindly replace paragraph number 7, on page 2, with the following rewritten paragraph:

[0007] U.S. Pat. No. 4,382,635 to Brown et al. attempts to overcome some of these problems by disclosing a wheel cover with integral retention fingers which is useable on conventional steel wheels. The cover is integrally retained on the wheel by the cooperating inter-engagement of tubular extensions of the cover mounting to the lug nuts. The extensions are axially slotted so as to be divided into a plurality of cantilevered fingers which cooperate with the lug nuts to retain the wheel cover thereto. The fingers of each extension include integral radially extending abutments which resiliently engage within a radial opening groove of a respective lug nut to resiliently grip the nut and retain the cover thereto. Concurrent with receipt of the abutments in the groove, a tapered radial face on each finger engages an axially outwardly extending annular face of the apertured embossment in an attempt to provide a slight axial outward force on each finger to prevent axial shifting movement of the extensions relative to the lug nuts.

Kindly replace paragraph number 9, on page 3, with the following rewritten paragraph:

[0009] One of several problems associated with this design is the adverse effects of tolerance ~~stack-ups~~ stack-ups between the axially outwardly extending annular face and the location of the groove on the lug nut. The fit of the cover to the lug nut depends on the depth and width of a groove that is on the lug nut and a tapered surface on the wheel face next to where the lug nut is seated. The tolerance build up among the radial tapered extension on the end of each finger of the cover, the lug nut, and the taper on the wheel's surface results in groove width variations that will prevent the radial tapered face of the abutment to move to

the bottom of the groove, resulting in a loose fit on the lug nut and a stress condition in the fingers of the retainer, thereby subjecting the retainer to the previously described problems regarding the use of plastic.

Kindly replace paragraph number 14, on page 5, with the following rewritten paragraph:

[0014] While the incorporation of the wire retainer addresses some of the problems associated with conventional plastic wheel covers, there are several difficulties with the Stanlake invention. The wheel cover taught by Stanlake can only be removed from the wheel by first removing the lug nuts which is a difficult and time consuming process as compared with conventional snap-fit plastic wheel covers. Furthermore, the wheel cover is limited to wheel applications in which it is desirable to have exposed lug nuts as access thereto is essential. Finally, the configuration taught by Stanlake, in which a one-piece wire band retainer encircles the perimeter formed collectively by the lug nuts, encircles each lug nut individually, and provides for a plurality of concave bends requires excessive wire material thereby incurring unnecessary material cost.

Kindly replace paragraph number 15, on page 5, with the following rewritten paragraph:

[0015] Because of the various problems identified with prior art retention systems, there is a need for a wheel cover having an integral fastening system that provides positive positioning of the cover relative to the wheel thereby eliminating the effects of tolerance ~~stack~~ ups stack-ups and the possibility of overtravel that result in poor fit of the cover to the wheel. There is also a need for a decorative wheel cover that is capable of covering the central portion of a wheel, including the lug nuts, that is easily attachable and removable, that maintains retention in high temperature environments, and that maintains retention after

repeated attachment and removal. The cover attachment must not affect the lug nut torque or the contact interface between the lug nut and the wheel surface area so that a standard lug nut can be used for both aluminum and steel wheels.

Kindly replace paragraph number 39, on page 11, with the following rewritten paragraph:

[0039] As best seen in Figures 1-3, the wheel cover 40 is integrally retained on lug nuts 20 of a vehicle wheel 12 that provides positive positioning in an inboard/outboard axial direction of the wheel cover 40 to the lug nuts 20. The lug nuts 20 typically have a flange 30 that defines an upper shoulder 32. In the preferred embodiment of Figure 6, of the present invention, the wheel cover 70 40 is provided with a number of elongated standoffs or tubular partially slotted extensions 50 axially projecting from the back of the wheel cover 70 40. The extensions 50 are each partially slotted to provide a plurality of cantilevered fingers 52. The cantilevered fingers 52 are preferably tapered such that the thickness of each cantilevered finger 52 decreases as the cantilevered finger 52 extends axially from the wheel cover 70 40.

Kindly replace paragraph number 40, on page 11, with the following rewritten paragraph:

[0040] Referring now to Figure 4, it can be seen that near the end of each cantilevered tapered finger 52 is an undercut groove 56 with a shoulder 56a that defines one end of the undercut groove 56 and a tapered portion 56b defining an opposite end of the undercut groove 56. Each cantilevered tapered finger 52, beyond the undercut groove 56, terminates in a bulbous portion 58. When the wheel cover 40 is attached to the wheel 12, the elongated tubular extensions 50 are aligned with the lug nuts 20 and the wheel cover 40 is moved axially inwardly of the wheel 12 so that the cantilevered fingers 52 separate slightly as their bulbous end portions 58 pass over the lug nut 20 and associated flange 30 until the undercut

groove 56 is allowed to snap over the flange 30 of the lug nut 20. Concurrently, the shoulder 56a of the undercut groove 56 will abut against the upper shoulder 32 of the lug nut flange 30, thereby providing a positive axial location of the wheel cover 40 to the wheel 12 and eliminating the effects of tolerance ~~stack-ups~~ stack-ups of any other surfaces.

Kindly replace paragraph number 41, on page 12, with the following rewritten paragraph:

[0041] As best seen in Figure 5, the bulbous portion 58 passes over the flange 30 of the lug nut 20 and the tapered portion 56b engages the underside of the flange 30, thereby creating a retention force sufficient to retain the wheel cover 40 on the lug nut 20. The end of the elongated tubular extension 50 is spaced a predetermined distance from the wheel 12 surface and does not contact the wheel 12 surface, such predetermined distance being controlled by the overall length of the lateral elongated standoffs 50, thereby eliminating the possibility of overtravel or interaction with the wheel 12 surface.

Kindly replace paragraph number 42, on page 12, with the following rewritten paragraph:

[0042] Referring now to Figure 6, the wheel cover 70 of the preferred embodiment includes the features described hereinabove with reference to the wheel cover 40 and further includes a front face 72 having visible decorative features, a rear face 74, and additional support features to locate and retain the wire band retainer 90. The support features of the wheel cover 70 include a plurality of ribs 76, and optionally a second plurality of ribs 77 and/or a plurality of locators 78. The ribs 76, the optional second ribs 77 and the optional locators 78 axially protrude from the rear face 74 of the wheel cover 70. The ribs 76 and the optional locators 78 are disposed between the elongated tubular extensions 50 on a peripheral surface of the rear face 74 of the wheel cover 70. The optional second ribs 77 are disposed on

the radial innermost cantilevered fingers 52 of the elongated tubular extensions 50. It should be appreciated by one of ordinary skill in the art that alternate configurations, arrangements and/or combinations of the optional second ribs 77 and locators 78 may be envisioned, and the above disclosure pertaining thereto should not be considered limiting.

Kindly replace paragraph number 43, on page 13, with the following rewritten paragraph:

[0043] As best seen in Figures 6 and 7, the wire band retainer 90 is preferably composed of a single piece of metal that is formed and welded. The wire band retainer 90 is generally circular and has a plurality of concave sections 92. The ribs 76, the optional second ribs 77 and/or the optional locators 78 position the wire band retainer 90 on the inner diameter of the circle having a perimeter defined by the elongated tubular extensions 50 collectively. After establishing location for the wire band retainer 90, the ribs 76 are adapted to engage and thereby axially retain the wire band retainer 90 as described in more detail below. The plurality of concave sections 92 are designed to align with an arc defined by a portion of each elongated tubular extension 50 such that the wire band retainer 90 engages a portion of each elongated tubular extension 50 to bias the corresponding cantilevered tapered fingers 52 and to minimize plastic heat creep.

Kindly replace paragraph number 44, on page 13, with the following rewritten paragraph:

[0044] Referring to Figure 8, a partial view of one of the ribs 76 is shown in detail. The ribs 76 each include an engagement slot 82, an engagement member 84 and a shoulder 86. The engagement slot 82 is preferably U-shaped and disposed in an innermost axial end of the rib 76 such that the engagement slot 82 defines the engagement member 84 and the shoulder 86. The wire band retainer 90 is assembled to the wheel cover 70 by inserting the

wire band retainer 90 into the engagement slot 82 which locates the wire band retainer 90 both radially and axially. After the wire band retainer 90 is disposed within the U-shaped engagement slot 82, the engagement member 84 is plastically deformed in a radially outward direction toward the shoulder 86 to permanently lock the wire band retainer 90 into place. The solid line representation of the engagement member 84 depicts the initial position thereof, while the phantom line representation depicts the deformed position of the engagement member 84 wherein the wire band retainer 90 is locked into place. It should be appreciated by one of ordinary skill in the art that Figure 8 represents the preferred embodiment, and that there are many other possible configurations for an engagement member 84 adapted to locate and retain the wire band retainer 90.

Kindly replace paragraph number 45, on page 14, with the following rewritten paragraph:

[0045] Referring to Figures 6 and 9, a an elongated tubular extension 50 of the wheel cover assembly 100 is shown attached to a lug nut 20. The concave sections 92 of the wire band retainer 90 engage only the radial innermost cantilevered tapered fingers 52 of each elongated tubular extension 50. Therefore, the wheel cover assembly 100 is easily attachable and removable because the wire band retainer 90 engages only the innermost cantilevered tapered fingers 52, and is designed to flex a predetermined amount while minimizing plastic heat creep. The remaining unsupported cantilevered tapered fingers 52 also flex sufficiently to attach to and disengage from the lug nuts 20.